

## Mount Hope, 13,933 ft—Northeast Ridge

### 12 miles round trip, 4,653 feet, class 2

Colorado's Fourteeners are popular. On a summer weekend, trails and summits will be busy with hikers who want to add to their Fourteener collection. So for solitude and spectacular mountain scenery, we chose a mountain that falls 67 ft short of the coveted designation—which meant we had ascent and summit all to ourselves.

Having left Aspen before dawn, we started at the Willis Gulch trailhead (9,305 ft) at 5:30am, just as daylight was breaking. The trail crossed the bridge over Lake Creek, skirted the lake and ascended into the woods to a bridge over another creek where it joined the Colorado Trail. Keeping left at the junction between Little and Big Willis Gulch, we continued until the trees opened up and we got our first glimpse of the summit. Two hours after we had started we reached a small lake at 11,780 feet.



From the lake, we had a full panoramic view of Mount Hope. Left of the summit we could see the Colorado Trail ascending to Hope Pass; on the right, a one mile long smooth ridge, first grassy, then steeper and covered in boulders. That was our route.

We left the trail just below the lake, veered off to the right, and climbed the steep grassy slopes to the ridge. The further route followed the ridge, first through grass, then stable talus to the top. The ridge does not have false summits—what you see is the actual summit. The spectacular scenery gave us plenty of excuses to pause for breath.



At 11am, we had reached the summit.

Near the summit plateau we saw a ptarmigan hen with five chicks, almost perfectly camouflaged, and a bit further down, we saw a mountain goat.



We descended the shorter East ridge towards Hope Pass. This was a different kind of ridge: steep loose rock, unpleasant and tedious, and we were happy that we did not have to come up that way. It took an hour to get down to the pass where we encountered the first people.



The trail was teeming with hikers and with runners training for the Leadville 100. We hiked the switchbacks down to the lake where we took another long rest to look back at our route and enjoy the last views of the summit. Then we packed up and hiked the last four miles down—perfect timing: a few minutes before we reached the trailhead, the first rain drops fell, and as soon as we closed the car doors, the downpour began.

